March 3, 2016

HL English Lit and Lang

The Things They Carried MEAL Paragraph

There are many themes in *The Things They Carried,* one being the overwhelming feeling of guilt that soldiers have when returning from the war. In Chapter 13 of the novel, the speaker solely communicates to the reader, not to the other characters in the story. He does this after repeating a graphic and gory description of a young Vietnamese boy that he found dead one day. In one encounter, his best friend Kiowa is trying to console him, saying, “‘Think it over...Then he said, ‘Maybe you better lie down a minute.’ Then after a long empty time he said, ‘Take it slow. Just go wherever the spirit takes you.’” This type of writing is used throughout the chapter. By formatting the chapter into long, detailed, and repetitive descriptions of the dead body and breaks of dialogue where only Kiowa speaks, it is easy to tell what his thoughts and emotions are at this time. The speaker is shocked and distressed, and feels guilt for “killing” the man. He chooses to punish himself by thinking of the life that the man probably had, and could have had, if he was not dead. Although it is unsure if he actually did kill the man, that is not the point that the writer is trying to make. I believe he is showing that no one comes home from a war unscathed--they will always have guilt and grief for the people they killed, and also for those they watched as they let them die. The guilt that the men feel is usually not entirely their own. War changes the way people think and act, and even function as human beings. This feeling never leaves the men, because like it is shown in chapter 13, after one repeats an image or a thought over and over in one’s mind, it is never truly forgettable.